

IBM's New Personal Computers

Will IBM Push 3.5-Inch Drives? ..

■ Users will be weaned off the 5.25-inch floppy disk standard by IBM very gently at first, it seems, the company being willing to rely on the 3.5-inch format's technological superiority and now increased availability to effect a gradual transition. "It's the same situation we had

years ago with mainframe computers," says Ed Thomas, the product manager for the new PC Convertible laptop (See REVIEWS), IBM's first U.S. personal computer to use the 3.5-inch format. (IBM now also offers optional internal and external 3.5-inch drives for their desktop PC, XT and AT computers.) "First you had keypunch cards and then tape and disks. As the technology advanced, people had to make the transition. It was costly, but in the long run it paid off."

While personal computer users will now cast their votes on the efficacy of the 3.5-inch format, IBM has already cast its lot. The company reportedly purchased 2 million 3.5-inch drives last year from Japan—Sony being a prime source—and has not stopped stockpiling since. IBM is planning to issue some of its software with both the 5.25-inch and 3.5-inch format disks packaged together. Thomas says IBM doesn't offer an external 5.25-inch drive option for the Convertible because the company's research indicates that people are willing to make 3.5-inch copies of data disks at the office for use with the Convertible at home or on the road.

... Software For The Convertible...

■ Microsoft Corp. promised that virtually all of its programs would be available on 3.5-inch disks by May 15. Users who have the latest version of programs are able to get 3.5-inch versions free of charge after showing proof of purchase. Those who have older versions of Microsoft programs, say Word 1.0 or 2.0, will have to pay an upgrade fee.

Ashton-Tate's Framework II, dBase III Plus (\$695 each) and MultiMate 3.3 (\$495) are due out on 3.5-inch disks by June 1, with MultiMate Advantage following within a few weeks. Lotus Development Corp. says 3.5-inch disk versions of 1-2-3 (\$495) will be available this summer; Symphony (\$695) in the fall. A reduced-price purchase offer for the 3.5-inch format is planned for current registered owners.

Additional 3.5-inch programs for the PC Convertible will come from MicroPro International: registered users of WordStar, WordStar 2000 and Easy can get a trade-in upgrade to the 3.5-inch format for \$20... Borland International: its entire line should be newly converted by mid-May... Software Publishing: PFS: and Harvard software users can get 3.5-inch versions for about \$15. New purchasers will receive a coupon redeemable for a 3.5-inch copy... Computer Associates: SuperProject Plus, SuperCalc 3 (release 2) and EasyWriter II will be packaged with both formats included in

a single package. Current users can get the 3.5-inch upgrade for \$50 per program... Living Videotext, Inc.: ThinkTank (\$195) and Ready (\$100) currently shipping... Lifetree Software, Inc.: Volkswriter 3 (\$295) trade-in upgrade for \$50... Micro Education Corp. of America: Managing Your Money (\$200), \$35 for registered owners... Microstuf, Inc.: Crosstalk (\$195) exchange available for \$20... Scarborough Systems, Inc.: MasterType (\$40) to be available this month... TCS Software, Inc.: TCS Client Ledger System (\$1,600), \$500 for registered users or \$150 as an exchange... Timberline Systems, Inc.: Timberline Architects Engineers and Timberline Series available only as free trade-in... Tronix Publishing, Inc.: Dollars and Sense (\$180) copy protection to be eliminated in both versions; free exchange available on purchases made up to 60 days following 3.5-inch release; \$40 thereafter...

Alpha Software Corp.: Electric Desk (\$345), Data Base Manager II (\$295), trade-ins are free or registered owners can buy an additional 3.5-inch program disk for about \$30.

... Limited Reaction ...

■ Few view the PC Convertible as a ground-breaking introduction that will spark the laptop market to new heights. "IBM hasn't reached any new price/performance level," says Michael Goulde, market analyst with the Boston-based Yankee Group. "Its capacity as a workstation falls short of what users want."

From competitor Compaq comes a raised eyebrow of skeptical surprise. "I don't think putting the IBM logo on an old technology changes anything," says Compaq's vice-president of marketing, Michael Swavely, who claims that Compaq has held back a laptop for two years because of market research that points to a small market not soon to grow.

... Clone Busting? ...

■ Compaq's Swavely was among those who searched in vain for substance in the clone-busting vow of William Lowe, IBM's president of Entry Level Systems Division, to keep competitors on their toes with future product introductions. Considering that more than a year and a half lapsed between the AT and the Convertible introductions, Lowe's remark has the tinge of saber rattling. Still, market acceptance of the enhanced and price-reduced IBM personal computer line will determine if IBM can stay ahead of its competition by merely catching up.

The AT models now run at 8 MHz, the same speed as competing models and 30 percent faster than the original AT. The basic model of the new AT also comes with a 30Mb internal hard disk. IBM's three upgraded XT models are no faster than the original models, but they do feature half-height 360k disk drives. And the top of the line model now has 512k standard, along with a 20Mb internal hard disk—twice the RAM and storage of the old XT line. IBM's vigorous cuts of memory capacity prices is aimed at add-on competitors.

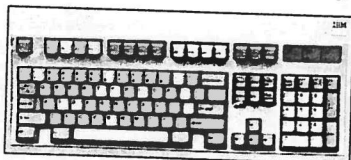


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UPDATE

Keys To The Kingdom...

■ Whatever else, we expect IBM's new keyboard to earn praise. The 101-key, Enhanced Personal Computer Keyboard becomes the standard with all new models of the XT and AT. The new keyboard isn't compatible with existing IBM products. On newer models, the conventional AT or Personal Computer keyboards can be ordered—if you insist. It seems as if IBM has fixed nearly everything that was wrong with the original keyboard. The enhanced keyboard has two Alt keys and two Control keys near the space bar so you can enter combination commands with one hand. Not everyone will quickly appreciate the 12 function keys across the top, despite the fact that more and more machines are sporting such layouts. For touch typists, ridges on a couple of keys will make it easy to find the home row without looking. No one will ever hit the backslash key by mistake again; the escape key is even more distinctive; and addition of a cursor-control cluster means you can use NumLock to better advantage.



Topside functions: A new standard.

... Big Blue Down Under

■ One personal computer missing from IBM's current lineup, which many observers think we'll see in time for Christmas, is a \$1,000 machine tailored for the home and education markets. A number of IBM watchers believe that what will constitute IBM's late 1986 entry is currently undergoing a test market of sorts in Australia, where last September, IBM launched the so-called JX personal computer. The JX is considered a full frontal assault on Apple's education market dominance, but is also positioned as a low-cost alternative for small business.

"We are positioning the product as an entry-level member of our PC family," Barry Dwyer, IBM Australia's JX product manager says. "We are trying to get across two messages: that the JX is low in cost and that it is a compatible member of the family." The machine is available in three basic configurations, all of which are based on the Intel 8088 chip running at 4.77MHz clock speed and priced from \$1,480 to \$2,355.

Software Update...

■ Microsoft Corp. of Redmond, Wash., has announced Microsoft Word, release 3 (\$450) with integrated outlining capability, mathematical and sorting functions, and expanded support for laser printers; there are 50 new features in all. Registered owners can upgrade for \$75; post-March 1 purchasers can upgrade for free... Also from Microsoft is Flight Simulator for the Macintosh (\$50) and Microsoft Access (\$250) version 1.01, which includes updated menus, a new installation feature for hard disks, speed enhancements, and non-copy-protected disks... Jazz version 1A for the Macintosh Plus, reduced to \$395 by Lotus Development Corp. of Cambridge, Mass., now offers faster disk access, hard disk support, and the ability to access one megabyte of RAM... Crosstalk (\$600), the communications program from Microstuf, Inc., Roswell, Ga., can now be used with IBM's PC and Token Ring Networks... Javelin Software Corp., Cambridge, Mass., is offering a \$20 Javelin Trial Pack, a non-copy-protected version of its \$695

business analysis and reporting software... Borland International has updated SideKick (\$100) for Apple's Macintosh Plus, with autodial, a percent key in the Calculator, and more. Upgrades are free to those who bought SideKick after December 15, 1985, \$20 otherwise... Borland also has updated the Reflex (\$100) data base, with enhancements including support for expanded memory beyond the 640k limit using either the Lotus/Intel/Microsoft or the AST Research Expanded Memory Specifications, and an ability to support more records and fields in memory. Owners of 1.0 can send Borland \$10 and the old diskette... NewWord 3 from Newstar Software, Inc., Pleasant Hill, Calif., has a spelling checker, keyboard macros, indexing of documents automatically or on user-defined items, multiuser and network support, and more, and can be obtained by trading in NewWord 2... And SetHP version 3.2 (\$50), from Orbit Enterprises of Glen Ellyn, Ill., now supports the latest HP LaserJet font cartridge, 92286Y. Users of version 3.0 and up can upgrade for \$8; \$18 for users of 2.0. Add \$2 shipping and handling... Version 5.1 of SmartKey (\$60), the keyboard macro processor from Software Research Technologies, now has window and menu design, mnemonic key names, and eight DOS functions. Users can upgrade for \$20... the first update (version 2.0) of XTree (\$50), an MS-DOS file and directory organizer from Executive Systems, Inc., Sherman Oaks, Calif., has new command menus, enhanced file copying, file moving, print functions, and more. Upgrades for registered users are \$10... Mindscape, Northbrook, Ill., has made its Balance of Power (\$50) simulation game available for the IBM PC... Rightwriter 2.0 (\$95) grammar and style checker from Decisionware, Inc., Sarasota, Fla., now has more rules, larger dictionaries, path name support, and is compatible with more word processors. Updates are \$25 for registered users... Version 2.0 of the Cambridge Spreadsheet Analyst, from Cambridge Software Collaborative, has been reduced to \$90 and now includes six report formats and an open-ended design to work with new add-in modules from the company... PeachText 5000 from Peachtree Software, of Norcross, Ga., is now compatible with IBM's PC AT and DOS 3.1.

... And Hardware Update

■ NCR has introduced a new model of the PC8 (\$4,990), an IBM PC AT-compatible personal computer, and new peripherals for the PC6 and PC8. NCR has also lowered prices on the PC4i, PC6 and existing PC8 computers. The new PC8 model features a 30Mb hard disk, 512k of RAM, and a 1.2Mb disk drive. Peripherals for the PC8 are a 64Mb internal hard disk (\$3,595), and a 30Mb internal hard disk (\$1,795)... DriveCard, the hard disk on a card from Mountain Computer in Scotts Valley, Calif., is now available in a 30Mb version for \$1,449... Hayes Microcomputer Products, Inc., of Norcross, Ga., has introduced a half card version of the Smartmodem 1200B (\$490 or \$550 with Smartcom software) for the IBM PC. The half-card version has two less DIP switches than the full-size card, and the switches have been placed on the board's back panel so they can be changed without having to remove the computer's cover... NEC Information Systems has announced the APC IV, a PC AT-compatible with high-resolution graphics capabilities and 6/8 MHz switchable clock speeds... Apple upgrades the "fat Mac" with 800k disk drive, new ROM that includes hierarchical operating system and a new monicker: Macintosh 512 Enhanced.